# AMBIGUITY IN ROMANIAN WORD-STRUCTURE. THE STRUCTURE OF PLURALS IN …*URI*

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**Abstract**. This study questions the conventional assumption that Latin nouns of the type singular TEMPUS – plural TEMPORA (where TEMPUS and TEMPOR- were in fact simply allomorphs of the lexical root) became subject in Romance to a reanalysis such that the final portion of the plural, …ORA, was identified as a novel (and hugely productive) desinence marking plural, continued as *-uri* in modern Romanian. Much of the evidence is consistent with this view but, focusing principally on Romanian (with some comparative observations from Italo-Romance), I show: (i) that many aspects of the history of this type presuppose the continued analysis of the final vowel aloneas an inflexional desinence, independent of preceding material (as it was in Latin); (ii) that changes in inflexional and derivational morphology indicate that speakers may still analyse …*ur*… as an integral part of the lexical root (as its antecedent …OR- was in Latin); (iii) that …*ur*… may even be treated as a secondary plural-marking formative, distinct both from the lexical root and the final desinence. Such plurals encode the same meanings as the corresponding singulars (lexical meaning and values for number and gender), but they are at least one syllable longer, and it seems that such structural 'asymmetry' between singular and plural leads to vacillation over how lexical and grammatical meaning is apportioned in the plural.

**Key-words**: Romanian; Italo-Romance; Latin; plurals; inflexion; morphology; diachrony.

## 1. ROMANCE REMNANTS OF IMPARISYLLABIC PLURALS, AND THE PLURALS IN -ORA

Most Romance languages have acquired patterns of allomorphy in the lexical root of the noun correlated with the distinction between singular and plural[2]. Virtually none of these are inherited from Latin and, indeed, Latin nouns had no root allomorphy exclusively correlated with number. There does survive from Latin, however, one type of allomorphy which is *nowadays* solely aligned with number. It arises because the Romance noun generally continues just the form of the Latin accusative (or, sometimes, the nominative: see Maiden 2000; Smith 2011: 283) and because certain Latin nouns displayed a type of allomorphy which was correlated with number as far as the accusative and/or nominative

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[2] For a comparative overview see, e.g., Maiden (forthcoming).



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were concerned. At issue are continuants of Latin 'imparisyllabic' nouns: in these, the nominative singular (together with the accusative singular of neuter nouns) comprises a bare lexical root, whilst other forms, including the nominative (and neuter accusative) plural, are at least one syllable longer, by virtue of having an inflectional desinence. Crucially, imparisyllabicity is usually accompanied by other, segmental and prosodic, alternations in the lexical root.

The most prominent example continues NOM.SG HÓMO 'person' – NOM.PL HÓMINES, a type widely preserved in Daco- and Italo-Romance, and Romansh (Romanian *om–oámeni*; It. *uómo* 'man' – *uómini*; Surselvan *um–úmens*)[3]; cf. also NOM.SG SÓROR 'sister' – NOM.PL SORÓRES > Aromanian *'sori* 'sister' – *su'rəri̯*[4]. In neuter nouns, accusatives were always identical to nominatives, so that imparisyllabic alternation involves accusatives as well as nominatives. One example of survival of an imparisyllabic neuter of this kind is NOM/ACC.SG CÁPUT 'head' – NOM/ACC.PL CÁPITA > Romanian *cap – cápete*, old Tuscan *capo – cápita.*

The most common type of survival of imparisyllabicity-related alternation associated with number in fact involves a continuant of the neuter nominative-accusative. Where it is found, principally in central and southern Italy and in Daco-Romance, it is so extensive, and so productive, that it tends to be treated by linguists as if it had become a different kind of phenomenon, involving (as we shall see) a novel form of plural desinence. At issue are continuants of a subclass of Latin third declension neuter nouns whose roots in the nominative-accusative singular end in …US (with zero desinence), and in the nominative-accusative plural in …OR- followed by the neuter nominative-accusative plural desinence -A. The alternation, in the latter portion of the lexical root, between …US and …OR, is the effect of a combination of regular sound change (intervocalic /s/ > /r/), together with a certain analogical adjustment affecting the penultimate vowel of the plural form (cf. Sihler 1995: 307). The nouns of this kind in Latin were[5]: TEMPUS 'time' – TEMPORA; PECTUS 'breast' – PECTORA; CORPUS 'body' – CORPORA; TERGUS 'back' – TERGORA; PECUS 'beast' – PECORA; PIGNUS 'pledge' – PIGNORA; LITUS 'shore' – LITORA; FRIGUS 'cold' – FRIGORA; STERCUS 'dung' – STERCORA; DECUS 'ornament' – DECORA.

The singulars of this handful of third declension neuter nouns apparently gave the impression of belonging to that extremely large and productive class of masculine/neuter second declension nouns characterized by singular desinences in -U- (NOM.SG -US, ACC.SG -UM): e.g., masculine HORTUS, HORTUM 'garden', DIGITUS, DIGITUM 'finger'. Thus the final portion of the lexical root in a word such as TEMPUS, namely …US, was, so to speak, 'mistaken' for a very common type of singular inflexional ending, with consequent 're-segmentation' of the singular as comprising a lexical root + inflexional desinence -US. Correspondingly, the plural type TEMPORA was apparently analysed as containing the newly created lexical root TEMP-, so that the remaining portion became in effect reanalysed

[3] In what follows I use an acute accent to mark the position of stress in orthographic forms, even if this does not follow the orthographic practice of the languages illustrated.

[4] Standard Romanian *soră – surori* does not, strictly speaking, display alignment of imparisyllabicity with number, given that the feminine plural form is also that of the genitive-dative singular.

[5] We also have OPUS 'work' – OPERA, LATUS 'side' – LATERA, GENUS 'kind' – GENERA, and a few others of this kind, showing what is in fact the etymologically expected reflex of the penultimate vowel in the plural. This pattern seems not to survive in Romance.

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as a novel inflexional marker of plural, -ORA. The small class of Latin nouns potentially subject to this structural reanalysis is the source of what has become (see, e.g., Gardani 2013: 367) an enormous and enormously productive one in Romanian, comprising many hundreds of nouns, where original -ORA became first -*ure*, later -*uri*: e.g., *timp* 'time' – *timpuri*, *piept* 'chest' – *piepturi*, *corp* 'body' – *corpuri*, *loc* 'place' – *locuri*, *pod* 'bridge' – *poduri*, *far* 'lighthouse' – *faruri*, *hard disk* 'hard disk' – *hard diskuri.* Crucially, this class is also characterized by 'alternating gender', that state of affairs extensively encountered among Romanian inanimate nouns such that the singular always selects masculine agreement and the plural always selects feminine agreement (for the historical reasons for this agreement behaviour, see, e.g., Maiden 2011: 171f.): e.g., *acest pod scurt* this$_{MSG}$ bridge short$_{MSG}$ 'this short bridge' – *aceste poduri scurte* these$_{FPL}$ bridges short$_{FPL}$ 'these short bridges'.

## 2. *-ORA*: A NEW TYPE OF DESINENCE?

All the historical accounts seem to assume, and many explicitly state[6], that the word-final string …ORA was reanalysed as a new kind of plural desinence, in the manner stated above. Yet this assumed reanalysis of the plural is much more problematic than it looks. First, the alleged new ending does not fit the general pattern of Romance number (and gender) desinences for nouns. The set of Latin plural endings inherited into proto-Romance plural endings probably comprised just[7] -I (originally a masculine nominative ending, -S preceded by a thematic vowel (an accusative, and in some words also nominative, ending), or -A (neuter nominatve-accusative) e.g., proto-Romance SG *aˈmiku 'friend' – PL *aˈmiki, SG *ˈpɔrta 'door' – PL *ˈpɔrtas, SG *ˈflore 'flower' – PL *ˈflores, SG *ˈɔssu 'bone' – PL *ˈɔssa. That is to say that they were 'monosegmental'. A new, 'bisyllabic'[8], desinence *-*ora* would have constituted a notable structural innovation, for it would have sounded nothing like any existing plural marker — and precisely this fact creates a problem for the traditional account of the development of …ORA as an inflexional desinence. A concomitant of the general disappearance of a distinct Latin neuter gender in Romance, is the reanalysis of the neuter plural -A as marking feminine gender. This change very clearly comes about because of the identity in form between the -A of original neuter plurals, and the -A which characteristic (in the singular) of a very large class comprising almost exclusively feminine nouns (the Latin 'first declension': e.g., FILIA 'daughter', MENSA 'table'). All this provides a perfectly plausible account of why, say, neuter BRACCHIUM 'arm' – BRACCHIA gets reanalysed as feminine in the plural[9] (e.g., Italian MSG *braccio* – FPL *braccia*; Romanian MSG *braț* – FPL *brațe*), but if the same argument is used to explain why plurals in …ORA are reanalysed as feminine, we encounter the problem. If we

[6] See for example Rohlfs (1968: 39); Wilkinson (1985–1991: 7; 107); Schön (1971: 7n12; 67n105); Maiden (2011: 172); Gardani (2013: 419).

[7] See, e.g., Maiden (1996; 2000; forthcoming).

[8] Throughout this essay I use the term '(bi)syllabic' somewhat loosely, since syllable boundaries almost never coincide perfectly with any word-internal morphological boundaries. The plural root allomorphs pronounced in isolation would indeed be 'bisyllabic', but of course they could never actually be uttered without the inflexional desinence. In the context of the full plural word-form, 'bisyllabic root' means 'containing two syllabic nuclei'.

[9] But see Loporcaro, Faraoni, and Gardani (2014).

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say that …ORA 'becomes a plural desinence', then we have no explanation of why it should also be treated as 'feminine', since it is in fact structurally unlike any other Romance gender (or number) desinence[10].

As a matter of fact, it is perfectly correct to say that the reason plural nouns in final …ORA were reanalysed as feminine was 'because they appeared to have a feminine ending'; certainly no other plausible explanation exists. This explanation involves conceding, however, that speakers segmented the string …ORA in such a way that its final vowel was a separate element from the preceding …OR-, one directly identifiable with the feminine desinence -A. That is to say, speakers did not apparently develop a 'new desinence' *-*ora.* Rather, …ORA was still segmented as …*or-a*.

In what follows I shall demonstrate the historical evidence, mainly from Daco-Romance but also with parallels from Italo-Romance, that speakers have not necessarily treated the reflexes of the word-final portion …ORA as an indivisible unit marking plural, and one distinguished from a preceding lexical root. Rather, the inflexional marker of plural has been delimited as the final vowel of this string -A (or its reflexes), distinct from preceding …OR- (or its reflexes).

## 3. ANALOGICAL REPLACEMENT OF FINAL -A, INDEPENDENTLY OF …OR-

Throughout its history, the final vowel of …ORA has been subject to various kinds of analogical replacement which leave the preceding portion,-OR-, unaffected. For example, the reanalysis of Latin neuter plural -A as feminine, explained above, still involves a paradox, in that the model for it is a characteristically feminine *singular* ending -A; so while there is a match for gender, there remains a mismatch for number[11]. Unsurprisingly, in some Romance varieties this anomaly is eliminated by replacing the final *-a* with a characteristically and uniquely feminine plural ending, namely *-e*, ultimately derived from proto-Romance *-*as* > *-*ai̯*> *-e* (see Maiden 1996 for arguments supporting this derivation)[12]. Such a substitution is sporadically attested in Italo-Romance, in parts of

[10] Interestingly, Gardani (2013: 419) argues that it is precisely the distinctness of the 'formative *-ora*' from the 'formative *-a*' that favoured the productivity of the former type, because, unlike *-a*, it was not susceptible to reanalysis as a feminine singular. However that may be (and our different views are not necessarily incompatible, given the argument that I shall develop here that the internal structure of such words may be ambiguous), to account for the feminine gender of such plurals in the first place, one has to recognize them as containing a desinence *-a*.

[11] Across the Romance languages, there are indeed numerous examples of original neuter plurals in -A reanalysed as feminine singulars, notably in the case of original third conjugation neuters: see, e.g., Maiden (2011: 171).

[12] I am assuming that the feminine plural desinence *-e* had already developed and that, by analogical extension, it replaced the -A of …ORA plurals as well. Given that some of the earliest attestations of the *-ora* plurals (in the medieval Italian charters surveyed by Aebischer 1933, and especially in texts from northern Italy), predominantly have the form *-oras* (cf. also Spitzer 1941: 347–349) could the rise of the -ore/-ure types described below not simply be a phonological development of a proto-form *-oras (> *-orai̯> -ore)? On this account, we could be dealing with a *syntagmatic* addition of a plural marking -s to the existing plural marker -ora, rather than a *paradigmatic* substitution of the *-a* of *-ora* by a feminine plural marker -as. Yet even if this were the case, there is good evidence that what has happened is not a simple affixation, but a paradigmatic

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Liguria, of Tuscany, of Umbria, of the Marche, of Calabria and of Salento, e.g., Borgomaro (Liguria) MSG *'brasu* 'arm' – FPL *'brase*, Elba (Tuscany) MSG *'brattʃo* – FPL *'brattʃe*, Mangone (Calabria) MSG *'bratʦo* – FPL *'bratʦe*, Serrastretta (Calabria) MSG *'larvu* 'lip' – FPL *'larve*, Salve (Salento) MSG *ɔ* 'egg' – FPL *'ɔve*, MSG *'tiʃitu* 'finger' – FPL *'tiʃite*. In Daco-Romance this replacement is absolute, and no trace[13] of the original *-a* survives: thus we find Romanian MSG *braţ* 'arm' – FPL *braţe*, MSG *corn* 'horn' – FPL *coarne*, MSG *semn* 'sign' – FPL *semne*, and so on. In the case of …ORA plurals, we observe exactly the same phenomenon, final *-a* being replaced with *-e*: thus in some Italo-Romance dialects of Salento, plurals infinal *...ora* replace the final *-a* by *-e* (e.g., Vernole *'nitu* 'nest' – *'niture*, *'aku* 'needle' – *'akure*), whilst *-ure* is already the only form attested in the oldest Romanian texts (e.g., MSG *lucru* 'thing' – FPL *lucrure*, MSG *pământ* 'land' – FPL *pământure*), and remains well preserved to this day in Istro-Romanian. In Romanian since the sixteenth century (and to some extent in Daco-Romance dialects south of the Danube, as well) the resultant *-ure* is in turn caught up in a more recent change whereby the feminine plural ending *-e* tends to be replaced by plural *-i* (see, e.g., Iordan 1938: 10–17; 32–35; 40–42). Scores of feminine nouns which originally displayed plural *-e* nowadays have *-i*: e.g., SG *roată* 'wheel' – PL *roate* > *roată–roţi*; SG *aripă* 'wing' – PL *aripe* > *aripă–aripi*; SG *gură* 'mouth' PL *gure* > *gură–guri*, SG *bucată* 'piece' – PL *bucate* > *bucată–bucăţi*; SG *coadă* 'tail' – PL *coade* > *coadă–cozi*). Similarly, nouns of the type MSG *foc* 'fire' – FPL *focure*, MSG *timp* 'time' – FPL *timpure*, MSG *ceas* 'clock' – FPL *ceasure* systematically replace the final *-e* by *-i*: *foc– focuri*, *timp–timpuri*, *ceas–ceasuri*, etc. Note, additionally, that while replacement of feminine plural final *-e* by *-i* is only lexically sporadic, such replacement is absolutely systematic in the case of *…ure* >*…uri*. I am unaware of any evidence of 'mixed' outcomes from Romanian dialects, Aromanian, or Megleno-Romanian, such that some nouns would have *…uri* while others retain *…ure*. This implies, in effect, that speakers have identified replacement of *-e* by *-i* as a property particularly associated with, but also independent of, a preceding *…ur-*.

## 4. *…UR-* / *…OR-* AS PART OF THE LEXICAL ROOT: EVIDENCE FROM DERIVATIONAL MORPHOLOGY AND ANALOGICAL LEVELLING

That *…ur-* (or Italo-Romance *…or-*) may be analysed by speakers as part of the lexical root, rather than of the plural desinence, is also manifest in the fact that it can be analogically introduced into the singular, or appear as the base form in derivational morphology. Tuscan adjectives derived from nouns, such as *ramoruto* 'branchy', *nerboruto* 'sinewy', *pettoruto* 'big-chested' betray an analysis of old plurals *ramora* 'branches', *nerbora* 'sinews', *campora* 'fields', *pettora* 'chests, breasts', such that *…or-* is taken to be a portion of the lexical root.Consider also *bagnoruolo* 'bath attendant' (cf. old Tuscan *le bagnora* 'the baths') and *camporella* 'little field' (cf. old Tuscan *le campora* 'the fields'). In Romanian, corresponding to *pic* 'drop' – *picuri* and *fel* 'kind' – *feluri* we have the verbs

*replacement* of *-a* by feminine plural *-as*. Some of the texts show, for example, ablative plural forms in *-is* (e.g., *tectoris* 'roofs$_{ABL.PL}$', *lacoris* 'lakes$_{ABL.PL}$') from which it is clear that the *-a* of *-ora* has been analysed as a discrete formative.

[13] There is no reason to assume that the Romanian plural *ouă* 'eggs' preserves Latin neuter plural OUA; it is a phonologically regular reflex of an historically underlying *-owe. For this, and other dialectal Romanian examples of plural *-ă*, see e.g., Maiden (2014: 41f.).

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*a picura* ‘to drip’ and *a feluri* ‘to differentiate’; for *râu* – *râuri* ‘river’[14] we have *a râura* ‘to stream’ and a diminutive *râurel*; from *frig* ‘cold’ – *friguri, şold* ‘hip’ – *şolduri, nod* ‘knot’ – *noduri*, *colţ* ‘corner’ – *colţuri, moft* ‘whim’ – *mofturi, vânt* ‘wind’ – *vânturi, deal* ‘hill’ – *dealuri*, we have the respective derived adjectives *friguros, şolduros, noduros, colţuros, mofturos, vânturos, deluros*. There are relatively few Italo-Romance instances of extension of the form in *...or-* into the singular, but Rohlfs (1968: 24) suggests that Calabrian *'amuru* ‘fishhook’ and *'tripuru* ‘hole’ are based on *...ora* plurals **'amora* and **'tripora*. This type of extension seems rather more common in Daco-Romance (see particularly Byck and Graur 1967: 66; Marin 2009), and here the extension of the form in *…ur-* into the singular does not seem essentially different from what happens in, say, *cap* ‘head’ – *capete* which, in the sense ‘end, extremity’, has given rise to a new singular, *capăt* incorporating (in a phonologically explicable variant, *-ăt-*) the *…et-* of the plural lexical root. A possible early example, whose original singular is not conserved in Daco-Romance, is a reflex of **'latu* ‘side’ – **'latora*, yielding Romanian *latură–laturi*. For examples from the more recent history of Romanian consider (following Byck and Graur 1967):

| original singular | plural | | SG | PL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *fag* ‘honeycomb’ | *faguri* | > | *fagure* | *faguri* |
| *fald* ‘skirt of coat’ | *falduri* | > | *faldur* | *falduri* |
| *frig* ‘cold’ | *friguri* | > | *frigură* | *friguri* |
| *arm* ‘part of hind leg of animal’ | *armuri* | > | *armur*(*e*) | *armuri* |
| *ram* ‘branch’ | *ramuri* | > | *ramură* | *ramuri* |
| *pic* ‘drop’ | *picuri* | > | *picur* | *picuri* |
| *strug*[15] ‘grape’ (regional) | *struguri* | > | *strugure* | *struguri* |

Such developments strongly suggest that *…ur-* was not analysed as part of a grammatical marker of plural, but as part of the lexical root. In nouns such as these, some of which arguably have locally unmarked plurals in the sense of Tiersma (1982), the plural root, complete with *…ur-*, has been extended to the singular.

## 5. THE ‘PROSODY OF THE ROOT’ AS EVIDENCE FOR *…UR-* FORMING PART OF THE ROOT?

There are various kinds of evidence that plural word-forms historically in final **...ora* (> Romanian *…ure, ...uri*) contain what I shall call ‘paroxytonic roots’[16], that is, lexical roots comprising a stressed first syllable followed by a second syllable containing an unstressed vowel, of which unstressed **...or-,* or its continuants, is the final portion. We need to see this in the wider context of the behaviour of Romance nouns with paroxytonic, bisyllabic, plural root allomorphs, and especially the reflexes of neuter NÓMEN ‘name’ – NÓMINA, which in old Romanian gave MSG *núme* – FPL *númere*. I will suggest that if this

[14] In the specific meaning ‘type of floral embroidery’ we also have, from plural *râuri,* a singular *râură.*

[15] See Marin (2009: 224) for the claim that *strug* is the historically underlying form.

[16] The entire word is thereby proparoxytonic, comprising a bivocalic root stressed on the first syllable, followed by an unstressed ending.

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noun exceptionally displays alternating gender, it is because it shared the same prosodic structure of the plural root as the reflexes of TÉMPUS – TÉMPORA, etc.

In general, Romance nouns with alternating gender do not have singulars in final *-e*. The reason for this, as argued for example in Maiden (2014a), is that alternating gender presupposes singular forms that, by their morphology, necessarily select masculine agreement, and plural forms that, by their morphological structure, necessarily select feminine agreement. Since singular final *-e* is ambiguous as to gender (the class of nouns with this ending comprises both masculines and feminines), there are virtually no such nouns in the alternating gender class, with the principal exception of Romanian masculine singular *nume* 'name'. This word has a feminine plural, which in the modern language is also *nume*. The details of the development of the modern plural is not the issue here, but its feminine gender seems to originate in an older form, attested as *numere* (Densusianu 1961:106), which is probably a phonologically regular reflex (via rhotacism of intervocalic /n/) of an earlier, albeit unattested, *'*numene* <NOMINA. It seems most likely that the property of being an inanimate noun having a paroxytonic root in the plural is what led to this plural being treated as belonging to the same class as *timp–timpuri* 'times', etc., and therefore as belonging to the class of nouns having feminine plurals alternating with masculine singulars, even though its singular – uncharacteristically for an alternating-gender nouns – ends in *-e*.

A different kind of evidence for the *timpuri* type as possessing a paroxytonic plural root allomorph in Romanian comes from certain other nouns with bisyllabic roots of the form 'C(C)VC(C)Vr in both singular and plural. These sometimes acquire novel singulars in regional varieties (cf. Byck and Graur 1967: 65f.): e.g., SG *crúmpir* 'potato' – PL *crúmpiri*, SG *hlújer* 'maize stalk' – PL *hlújeri*, SG *jneápăr* 'juniper' – PL *jnéperi* > *crump* – *crúmpiri, hluj* – *hlújeri, jnep* – *jnéperi*. The model for the creation of such singulars is surely the type *timp–tímpuri*, but the specific basis for the analogy seems to be that the lexical root should be of the form 'CVC(C)Vr; that is, it involves assuming that the type represented by *tímpuri* has a root allomorph *tímpur-*, rather than *timp-*, in the plural[17].

## 6. EVIDENCE FOR *-UR-* AS A SECONDARY DESINENTIAL MARKER OF PLURAL?

There is some marginal evidence for speakers' treating the reflexes of plurals such as *'*nomena* 'names' and *'*kapeta* 'heads' as comprising a lexical root *'nom-/'kap* followed by an element *-en-/-et-* redundantly marking number in addition to the final vowel[18]. That is to say that these words comprise three formatives, the last two of which each, and independently, signal number. In Megleno-Romanian MSG *kap* 'heads' – FPL *'kapiti*, has in the plural analogically influenced the second syllable of the reflexes of plural *'*nomena*, yielding MSG *'numi* – FPL *'numiti* (cf. Atanasov 2002: 206), instead of the expected plural **'*numini.* This development presupposes the morphological distinctness

[17] Since *-uri,* and *-eri* or *-iri* contain different vowels, it seems unlikely that *-eri* and *-iri* could somehow have been analysed as alternative 'plural desinences'.

[18] In fact, the editors of Philippide (2011) seem to make just this assumption (footnote to p.148f.), but do not justify their analysis. For some other Romance diachronic evidence of the reanalysis of the second part of bisyllabic plural allomorphs as independent, distinct, linear exponents of number, see, e.g., Lausberg (1966: §591), Rohlfs (1968: 41), Tuttle (1982).

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of the portions *-it-* and *-in-* both from the preceding lexical root, and from the final plural desinence, since one can substitute the other. The fact that in certain southern Romanian dialects (see Marin, Mărgărit, and Neagoe 1998: 92) we find *númuri* as the plural of *núme*[19], in turn suggests a similar reanalysis of the portion **-en-* of a historically underlying plural **'numene*, and indicates that *-en-* and *-ur-* shared the status of distinct, linear, secondary markers of plural. Parallel developments are observable in medieval dialects of central and southern Italo-Romance not only for reflexes of NÓMEN – NÓMINA, but also, sometimes, for those of the phonologically and morphologically similar LÚMEN 'light' – LÚMINA and FLÚMEN 'river' – FLÚMINA. These had masculine singulars of the type *nome*, *fiume*, *lume*, with 'monoysllabic' roots *nom-*, *fium-*, *lum-*, and the ending *-e*, but *nome* in particular could develop a feminine plural *nómora*, and one sometimes finds also *lúmora, fiúmora*[20]. Again, it seems, that both a historically underlying **-en-* and the element *-or-* of plurals like *témpora*, may each have independent status as plural markers, so that one may substitute the other. The same mechanism may also explain why the old Italian proparoxytonic feminine plural *cápita* (masculine singular *cápo*) was widely replaced by *cápora* (traces of which persist in some modern dialects: see e.g., *AIS* map 93, for Ausonia in Lazio, and Vernole in Salento).

## 7. ON THE AMBIGUOUS STATUS OF ROMANIAN PLURAL IN *…UR…*

The point of this study has not been to deny the traditional perception that Romanian '*-uri* is an inflexional desinence', on a par with the other plural desinences *-i* or *-e*. At first sight *-uri* appears to be just this, and on the whole such an analysis works perfectly well for the synchronic and diachronic description of the language (not to mention for pedagogic purposes). Several changes, indeed, seem most elegantly and plausibly described simply as analogical extensions of a 'desinence *-uri*'. One example is its relatively recent introduction into the plural of some feminine mass nouns (e.g., SG *carne* 'meat' – PL *cărni* > *carne* – *cărnuri*; cf. Maiden 2014b), and another is an observed tendency for the replacement of the whole of *-uri* by the desinence *-e* (cf. Iordan 1956: 283–285) as plural marker. The point, rather, is that the diachronic and comparative evidence suggests that speakers do not *necessarily* segment in this way those plural word-forms which are distinguished from their singulars by the final string *-uri*. In old[21] Romanian the singulars were overwhelmingly analysable as comprising a lexical root-formative and an inflexional desinence *-u*, marking 'masculine singular' (e.g., *timp-u*). But

[19] Recall that plurals in final *-uri*, and gender-alternating plurals in general, almost never have singulars in *-e*, so some additional explanatory factor has to be found to account for the morphological behaviour of this word.

[20] The etymologically expected (masculine) plural type *nómini* seems to have existed (it is attested for example in the fourteenth century Tuscan *Bibbia volgare* and the *Libro di Sidrach*). The *OVI* database gives just one example of *fiumora* (in the Cronica of Matteo Villani), and five of *lumora* (three from the Aquilan Buccio di Rinallo and two from the Florentine *Leggenda aurea*). There are several dozen thirteenth and fourteenth centuries examples of *nomora* from central Italy. See also Caragaţă (1936: 39f.); Formentin and Loporcaro (2012: 228). Gardani (2013: 347n578, 579) confirms the absence of corresponding singulars of the type ***nomo*.

[21] In the modern language final *-u* has largely been deleted, so that the mismatch between singular and plural is even greater.

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the plural is at least one syllable longer than the singular, so that the same information (lexical meaning and a value for number and gender) is distributed over a larger expanse of phonological material. It is therefore not surprising, in the light of this paradigmatic asymmetry, that there may be vacillation, in the plural, over which part of the word-form to assign to lexical meaning, and which to grammatical. We have seen evidence that speakers may identify the final vowel as an inflexional marker of number, independently of preceding …*ur*-, and also that they may treat …*ur*- as if it were an integral part of the lexical root. We have also seen evidence that speakers may divide the word structure both to the 'right' and to the 'left' of -*ur*-, treating this element as a secondary desinential marker of number.

The question whether -*uri* 'is a plural desinence', or whether …*ur*- is part of the lexical root, or whether it is a distinct morph syntagmatically intermediate between lexical root and desinence, is simply not clearly answerable diachronically, and this is because speakers themselves do not appear to have found, or even to have needed, a stable and unambiguous answer to it.

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*OVI = Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* http:www.ovi.cnr.it

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